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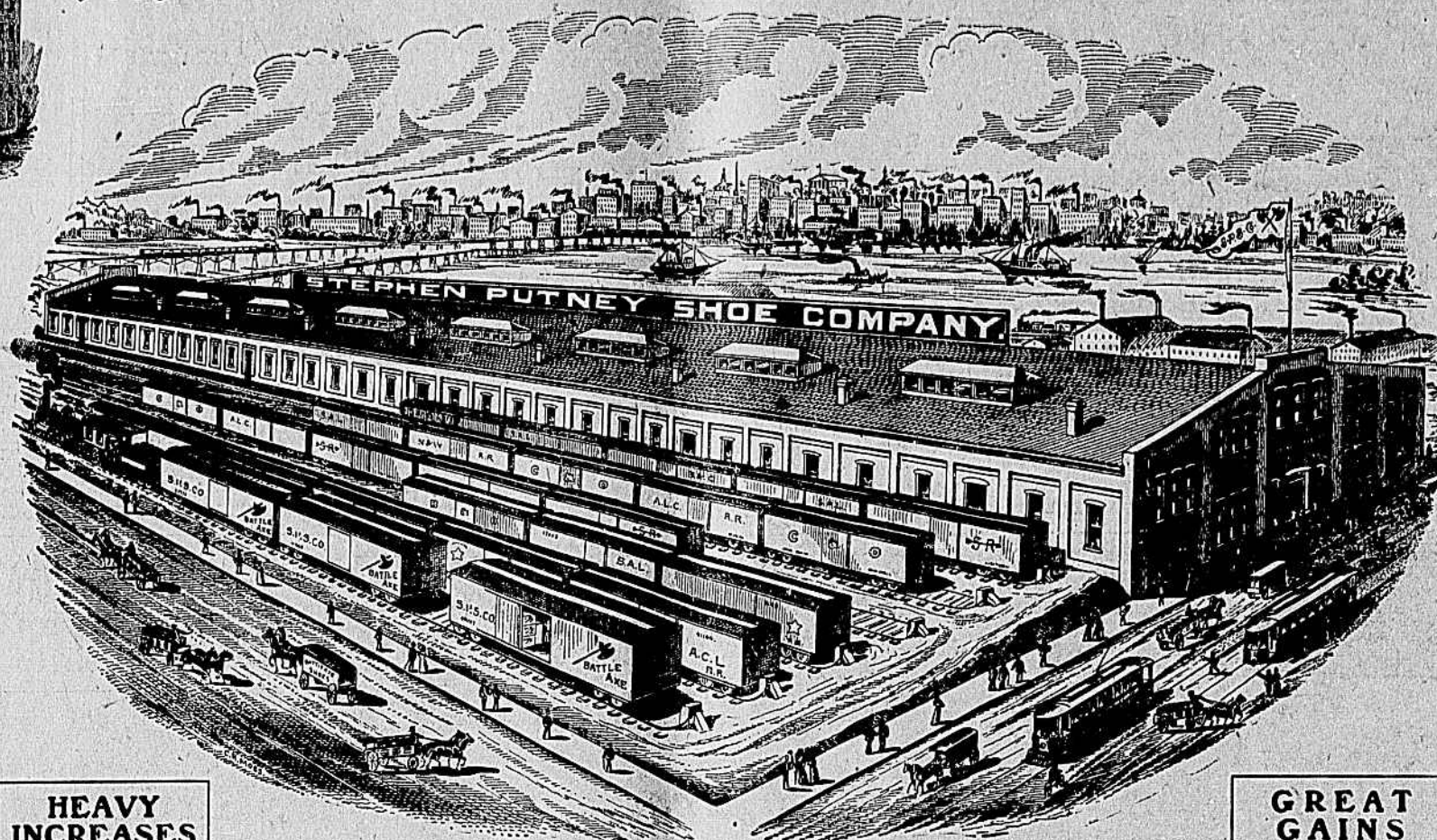
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DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA

HOWARD LEE MCBAIN.

Not long ago I heard a prominent and influential educator referred to by a man of affairs as a fanatic because he believed education to be a universal panacea for all the ills of our civilization. The accusation, whether just or unjust, suggests an interesting opposite phase to that much quoted aphorism, "Ignorance is a cure for nothing." And more than this, it forces home upon us a consideration of the practical question: what are the substantial social achievements of education when universally applied?

It may be a delusion whether a "panacea for the ills of civilization" is a desirable discovery, laying aside the very pertinent question of its possibility. We progress by friction. Our civilization consists not so much in the splendor of our material possessions as in those qualities of moral strength, of purposeful initiative, of steadfastness of aim and in that capacity for self government which have become the genius of the race through centuries of rough discipline and development. It is true, however, that in recent years the method of our attack upon social evils has changed. The whole tendency of modern civilization has been away from punitive methods and in the direction of those of prevention and reform. And it is among the preventive and corrective forces which are playing as large a part in the rapid advancement of civilization that education takes undisputed preeminence. If there is any one force which, speaking in the unequivocal language of experience, promises the largest return to society in the progress of

virtue and probity among its members and in the final adjustment of social complications and abuses, that one force is education. Unfortunately neither business men nor educators give half enough thought to the tendencies of civilization and the direct influence borne upon these tendencies by education. I would take the broad ground that no adequate appreciation of the problems of modern life will be reached until men of affairs come to regard problems of politics and society as fundamentally educational, and until teachers learn to look upon the whole problem of education as essentially sociological. Fortunately, however, the deep and abiding interest of the American people in matters of education and their realization of educational needs, do not hang upon their general recognition of so far-sweeping a truth. The day has long since passed when it was necessary for educational enthusiasts to keep ever before the public all the cogent arguments in favor of education in general and public education in particular. Few to-day have the temerity to confess their indifference to the subject, and none, their antagonism. But the trouble is there are so many people who are interested in education in the abstract, and so few who are willing to be taught a lesson from the dull gray book of facts and figures. It is this lesson from the book of facts and figures which the intelligent people of Virginia to-day stand most in need of being taught. The burning question is: what are the immediate needs of our educational system, and how may they be most effectively met? And these are questions which ought not to be asked without receiving a definite and fearless reply—a reply that does not shrink from the revelation of our present inadequacy and content itself with voicing the marvelous measure of our educational progress and heroism. It will not suffice to fall back in extenuation upon the noble and generous exertions already made in behalf of education, and to point the finger of apology to the insuperable obstacles we have encountered in working out even a partially efficient system of education. The accomplishments of our people in this regard need no apology. Only the intelligent conception and the sacrificial service of our noblest, though too often our obscurest, spirits could have made them possible. That the margin of the unachieved is not far broader is our reasonable glory. But the appalling fact remains—whatever may have been its ultimate cause—that in Virginia to-day, eleven out of every hundred white persons over ten years of age are still groping in the horrible darkness of illiteracy; while the average length of the school term for every child between the ages of 5 and 18 is less than 60 days in the year. It is with such homely actualities as these that the people of Virginia are called to face. We are an integral part of a nation whose just pride is the success of her stupendous scheme of democracy. But the beset assumption of democracy is that potential political equality of its people which an inadequate system of schools alone can give. And when we speak of democracy we must bear in mind that in Virginia, in common with the rest of the South, the triumph of democracy is comparatively a modern achievement. The whole struggle of our people for constitutional equilibrium during the first half of the nineteenth century was the endeavor to adjust a democratic organization of government to an aristocratic organization of society based upon the existence of slavery as an institution. It was only when the whole social fabric was torn aside as an immediate result of the Civil War that the beginning of a real democracy was had. The common white man became a possible entity in politics and society. In an aristocratic society, where the dogma

of individualism spread its destructive overgrowth, there was no place for public education. In a democratic society, where the advancement of the whole is directly dependent upon the progress of its individual units, there can be no healthful existence without an increasingly efficient system of public education. In any democratic community, social progress is directly commensurate with the advancement of public intelligence. It seems to me that in thus harking back to the social, political and economic conditions of yesterday, we can best comprehend the educational needs of to-day. Under the old order of things, the work of a day was still a transitional stage. The old aristocratic order is still behind us, a new order of things is before us but the new democracy is not yet realized and will not be fully realized until books and newspapers and the chance to acquire a handicraft are made possible through schools for every child in the State, whether he be rich or poor, white or black.

That the problem of education in Virginia presents enormous difficulties is true enough. It is true of the problem throughout the South. The presence of the negro gives rise to the necessity for a double system of schools and, in consequence, to doubled fiscal burdens. Moreover, our population, in spite of our municipal growth, is still largely rural. According to the latest United States census reports, less than one fourth of the population of Virginia live in incorporated towns, of which there are 166 in the State, and sixty-eight of these, in the class containing less than 500 inhabitants. Our problem, therefore, is largely the problem of the rural school, the school of the people. Residents of cities are too often prone to look upon themselves as the people, and in grappling with the stout problems of municipal existence, to forget that there are those beyond who do not share the educational advantages they enjoy.

If our problems are formidable, our courage and our enthusiasm are undiminished. If, through the shortsighted policy of our forefathers, who grafted the negro upon our soil, we are to-day saddled with the tenebrous problem in the life of the nation, we may take heart of hope in the thought that our greatest hero has ever lain in the equality, the courage, the heroism, with which the consequences of our people's blunders have been met and overcome. The condemnation of any people lies not so much in its first false step, taken in blindness and often, as in our case, in unwillingness, but in the failure to apply to the solution of resulting problems the practical genius of a more enlightened generation.

Surely no more significant movement has ever commanded the attention of the people of Virginia than that which has been inaugurated, with the promise of such great success, by the Co-operative Education Commission of Virginia, with its general aim, the betterment of the country common schools. Its inspiring programme of purposes tells at once the whole story of our educational needs, as well as the wisdom and practical insight of those noble spirits who are directing the nascent energies of the commission. A nine months' school for every child, taken in blindness and often, as in our case, in unwillingness, but in the failure to apply to the solution of resulting problems the practical genius of a more enlightened generation.

programme of such definite reforms cannot fail to arouse the interest of every patriotic man and woman of Virginia. Standing, not for criticism, but for construction, the commission would further the cause of the gospel of opportunity. But its ultimate success must depend largely upon the measure of generous and active sympathy accorded it by the people throughout the State.

Can society afford to be a supine witness while the door of opportunity and self-respecting employment remains shut in the face of the aspirations and ambition of any child? Should not the chances of the child be kept well in pace with the onward march of the nation? Can we hope to beat in harmony with the natural destiny in any surer way?

We have recently in our constitutional revision taken our stand upon the sound principle of a reasonable educational qualification as a condition of participation in the government. Even laying aside those higher and nobler appeals of the right of the individual to enjoy the opportunity for self-betterment, does it not become our immediate duty, rejoicing in the standard of intelligence we have set for our democracy, to place in the easy grasp of every child in the State the chance of political, mental and moral manhood?



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CHARLOTTE, N. C.

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)
CHARLOTTE, April 15.—Mr. Harry Shaw, of this city, and Miss Eva Ross, of Gaffney, S. C., were married Wednesday afternoon at the First Baptist Church at Gaffney. Mr. J. Herbert Howell, brother-in-law of the groom, was best man. Mr. Shaw is a son of W. E. Shaw, head of the Shaw-Harness Manufacturing Company, of Charlotte, and is one of the foremost young business men of the city, while his bride was a belle of the South Carolina town.

The engagement of Miss Irene Henderson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Henderson, one of Mecklenburg's fairest daughters, and Mr. Frank L. Andrews, has been announced. The prospective groom is a prominent young business man.

Mrs. Walter Scott gave a card party Monday evening at the residence of Mrs. John M. Scott to a number of her friends, who thoroughly enjoyed the evening. The first prize was won by Miss Carrie Marshall Brown, the visitor's prize by Mrs. Paul Chatham, the consolation prize by Mrs. Robert Mayer, and the puncher's prize by Mrs. Charles Parker.

The Shakespeare Club met with Mrs. Helen Hall Monday evening, the subject for discussion being Othello.

Bored had an interesting meeting with Mrs. John F. York Tuesday afternoon at her home in Alhambra.

The Electric Book Club met with Mrs. R. E. Cochran Monday afternoon.

Miss Irene Allison left Tuesday for Scotland Neck, N. C., where she will be bridesmaid on the 18th instant at the wedding of Miss Mary Estelle Johnson, of that town, to Mr. Paul L. Sordary.

At a largely attended meeting of the Woman's Club held Monday afternoon, the following officers were elected: President, Mrs. J. E. Kelly; Vice-President, Mrs. L. W. Faison; Recording Secretary, Mrs. Edwin Howard; Corresponding Secretary, Mrs. Lucy Halliburton; Treasurer, Mrs. J. Lee Hunter. Delegates to the State Federation of Women's Clubs, which will meet in Goldsboro, N. C., in May were elected as follows: Mesdames C. C. Hook, H. D. Heath and H. A. Murrell.

Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Long Barringer, have returned from their honeymoon, which was spent in Florida.

Miss Gertrude Kearney, daughter of Admiral George Kearney, of the Brooklyn navy-yard, and Miss Phoebe Terry, daughter of Lieutenant Terry, of the Naval Academy, are guests at the home of Captain John Wilkes, a retired naval officer.

Mrs. Edward W. Flagg, of Potomac, N. Y., who has been the guest of Mrs. Lucy Halliburton for some time, has gone to Indiana, where she will visit her father before returning home.

Miss Zila Whitley, of Georgia, is a guest at the hospitable home of Mr. John Houston, in the county.

The Deaf and Dumb Barber.
Louis Stovall is a deaf and dumb barber in this city. The other day a commercial "drummer" went to Stovall's shop for a shave and shampoo. The end of the towel tickled him in the ear and he asked Louis, to tickle it in, which request was complied with in that it was accompanied by more or less pantomime. The tickling towel reminded the drummer of a bug story which he immediately began to relate to the (tonorial) artist. In his peculiar and inimitable style. When the next barber asked him who he was talking to he explained that he was telling his barber a funny story and sailed ahead.

"Were you ever in Kansas?" he asked. Louis said nothing, but still the drummer did not get wise. When he finished the story and got to the big laugh, Louis was out in front stripping his razor and never batting an eyelid. But the other barbers laughed long and loud, and when the light dawned the man with the big story went and dug up a special box he had won on results in West Virginia and everybody, including Louis, smoked up. Austin Texas Statesman.

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